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Long-term Investment in Professional Development: Building Capacity Through Industry-academia Collaboration

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The graduate skills gap, or weak employment preparedness level, is both anecdotally and academically recognised on a global scale (Mosher et al, 2023; Somerville, 2019). In geoscience, this is reflected by a lack of appropriately skilled entry-level personnel leading to their being employed in approximately 22% of positions (Mosher et al, 2023).

This is a critical issue in locations where mining is fundamental to employment, development and national productivity, such as Zambia and Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Historically, this has been mitigated through employment of expatriate geoscientists, which brings its own challenges. Building capacity of the national institutions to foster local talent is a foundational step in ensuring a skilled workforce pipeline which benefits local industry and the national economy. Moreover this is increasingly a local legislative requirement for industry.

Stemming from the SEG 2024 conference in Namibia, which included pre- and post-conference trips for the Central African Copperbelt and the Zambian Domes Region, and the 2024 “Next Generation of Economic Geology” symposium in Dublin, an organising committee of industry partners, academics and third party organisations (SEG and iCRAG) collaborated to create a symposium focused on knowledge-sharing in the Central African Copperbelt for current undergraduates and early career geoscientists. The 2025 symposium was a resounding success, with strong engagement with active industry partners and students for a roughly even proportion of attendees. Based on this success SEG is again partnering with iCRAG and industry to facilitate a second symposium in June 2026.

This presentation aims to showcase the impact of these events, and outline practices that may be applied to other regions to create bespoke industry – academia partnered events, balancing the collaborative and competitive, support the development of local talent, secure a skilled workforce pipeline, and to impart the current state of the art thinking for future developments.